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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 000227

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PARIS FOR JORDAN; LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL SY IS

SUBJECT: SYRIAN KURDS VOICE THEIR THOUGHTS ON STATE  
STATEMENT, QAMISHLI SITUATION

REF: A. DAMASCUS 0203

1B. 07 DAMASCUS 1094

Classified By: CDA Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (C) Summary: During the week starting March 27, Poloff met with a range of Kurdish contacts to discuss conditions in Qamishli after the deadly regime crackdown on Nohruz celebrations and their reactions to the State Department,s statement condemning the crackdown. All three contacts agreed on three points: 1) the situation in Qamishli remains extremely tense; 2) the Department,s statement was welcome but; 3) the U.S. and other Western governments should look for ways to increase the scope and depth of assistance to the Kurdish minority in Syria.

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THE SITUATION IN QAMISHLI: TENSE BUT STABLE  
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12. (C) On March 31, Luqman Oso of the Kurdish Azadi party said that there have been no further reports of unrest in Qamishli since the March 21 crackdown (ref A), but an unusually heavy security presence continued in the city. Oso noted that the Nohruz incident was the second time in six months that the SARG had used deadly force to put down a crowd of unarmed Kurds in Qamishli. Oso said that he believed the SARG wanted to instigate a fight with the Kurdish minority, possibly to make them appear as disloyal in the eyes of Syrian Arabs. During a March 30 meeting, Hervin Osse of the Kurdish Future Movement reported that she had also not heard of any more outbreaks of violence in Qamishli since March 21. Like Oso, Osse said that she fears the SARG will step up its campaign of aggression toward the Kurdish minority and that many Kurds in the east of the country share their fears.

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REACTIONS TO THE U.S. STATEMENT  
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13. (C) Osse said she and her movement applauded the Department,s March 28 statement, which both deplored the SARG,s use of violence in Qamishli and demanded an investigation into the incident. She urged the USG to do more to support Kurdish interests in Syria and asked why more was not being done.

¶4. (C) Oso echoed these comments, praising the State Department's statement while also stressing the need to do more. Oso said he and his party were looking for a way to bring up the SARG's Nohruz crackdown in the U.N. If the U.N. could launch a probe into the killings, it would open the door for closer scrutiny from the international community scrutiny of the SARG's treatment of the Kurds, possibly through resolutions at the U.N. In particular, Oso said he hoped that the U.N. would take up the issue of the 300,000 stateless Kurds in Syria 2005 and the assassination of Kurdish reformer and Sufi cleric Sheikh Murad Khaznawi, comparing him in importance to assassinated former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri due to his appeal to both Arabs and Kurds. (Note: Khaznawi originally went missing on May 10, 2005 and was found dead on June 1. Although, the precise details around his death are unclear, many of his supporters believe the SARG was directly responsible.)

¶5. (C) On March 27, freelance journalist and human rights commentator Messud Akko also said he was supportive of statements. He added that a series of statements from Western countries addressing the Kurdish question more generally would further pressure the regime and raise international awareness. The primary points Akko recommended were the approximately 300,000 stateless Kurds in Syria, lack of economic development in the Kurdish areas of Syria, the legalization of the Kurdish language, and the SARG's incomplete investigation of the Khaznawi assassination.

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LACK OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION  
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¶6. (C) Osse said she was disappointed by the lack of media coverage of the SARG's deadly use of force against unarmed Kurdish crowds twice in less than six months (ref B). She suggested perhaps U.S.-funded Arabic satellite channel al-Hurra could give more attention to the Kurdish question in Syria. In addition, the French Ambassador Michel Duclos (protect) expressed disappointment at the EU's lack public statements. When pushed by the Pol/Econ chief, an EU contact said that the EU would likely not make any public statements about the SARG's treatment of the Kurdish minority.  
CORBIN